God of the Mess

Matthew 1:1-17

Pastor Josh Luse

I am Josh Luse and if we didn't get a chance to meet last summer, I am one of the youth pastors here at Lincoln Berean. I am deeply humbled and so excited to be here with you this morning. I thought maybe we'd start out with a little quiz to get us going. Alright? How many of you, by raise of hands, would say, "I agree that people are weird?" *(laughter)* Great, right, I think it was unanimous. Good. Alright, how many of you would agree that I am weird? *(laughter)* Teenagers! Hands all over, teenagers. Ya! How many of you would say that while people are weird, you yourself are normal? Okay, a couple of honest ones in the bunch. How many of you would say that the person sitting next to you—no, we're not going to go there. *(laughter)*

The reality is we're all a little weird and we all have these different quirks about us. We all carry these different messes along with us. If you don't believe me, let me illustrate it in a couple other ways. Just come through this season. How many of you this season, in the next month, are going to go out and get a tree that looks like it should go in your front yard or back yard and you're going to go ahead and bring that right on into your living room? Ya, why don't you just pick up an oak tree for the dining room while you're at it? How many of you are going to put socks up on the mantle of your fireplace and it's not that they're wet; they're for decoration, and you're going to put candy in them because it's fun to eat candy out of socks. I'm just saying, we all have these different odd things that we do.

For me, one of things that I loved as a tradition growing up was the nativity. I loved every year getting the chance to set up this nativity set. So our family would come and we would get everything out. We'd clean it up; we'd dust it off. If it had hay in it, we'd even grab some hay and make sure it was cleaned off and make sure everything was right and in the right position because everything did have a position. If you put one of the shepherds right here and Jesus was over here, it just didn't quite work. You'd have to make sure everything was all set for that. But what I really loved—and I never got permission to do this—but growing up, I knew that every year there was going to be an epic battle between the nativity set and my GI Joe soldiers, and so there would be Mary sitting there all stealthy-like looking at Jesus, and she would—waaaaal—come alive, and Joseph would grab his staff and—whhoooo, whhhooo, whhhooo—start going to town. The wise guy would climb up on the roof getting ready for the ambush. And I loved it! But every year after we got everything put in place, we would stand back and look at it and everything was just perfect. It looked like Joseph had just gotten out of the shower and blow-dried his hair. Everything was just perfect and we'd say, "Ahh, the manger."

But the interesting thing, as I think about it and as I read through Scriptures, that maybe there're a couple of things that are missing to make it maybe a bit more realistic. Every year my family and I, we get to go down to my mother-in-law's house, to her farm. If we're lucky, we will get to help them do chores. So as we are walking into the barn or maybe going to gather eggs from the chicken coop, as soon as we walk in, there's a certain odor that just fills up your nose and there's dust floating around—you can almost taste it. And inevitably every year I step in something as well, that I end up having to scrape off. So honestly, if we wanted to make this a little more realistic, we'd go out to the pasture, we'd find a nice fresh cow pie (if you have dogs, that will work too); we'd gather up some goods and we'd go get some dirt and we would bring it into the living room and we would

sprinkle it around on the coffee table by our nativity set. Kids, it's okay. It will make it more realistic, right? But we don't do that.

But the reality is, this was pretty messy. When you think of what was taking place: a woman was coming to have a child in the mess and chaos of this busyness of this world, so chaotic, so messy, there wasn't even a place for them. So they end up in a barn, in a stable where animals are, and it's here that the Savior of the world chooses to make His entrance.

Now generally we go to Luke for this, but this morning I'm going to take you to Matthew. But let's start out with a word of prayer.

> *Father, thank You so much for this season that helps us to remember who You are and what You've done for us. Father, thank You for this book that is alive, that challenges us and stretches us and shapes us into who You would have us to be. Father, I pray that as we study Your word this morning, God, would You allow it to come alive in our lives? Would You stretch us? Would You challenge us? Would You convict us that we could leave this week ready to follow You. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Now like I said, generally we will go to Luke, but this morning I'm going to have you go to Matthew, Chapter 1. We're going to look at this a little bit differently. If you've got a Bible, you can follow along. If you don't, you can listen as I struggle through a few names here. Matthew 1:1:

> **The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa. Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah.** (Now if you're expecting or looking for baby names, maybe take a couple notes here) **Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor. Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud. Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.**
>
> (*NASB Matt. 1:1-17)

Now as we look at this, that's a lot of names. I don't know if any of you, whenever you come to a list of names in the Bible and you look at it and you go, "Oh," flip, *(laughter*) and then continue on. I don't know if anybody will admit that. Maybe it's just me at times. But we don't want to miss this, this morning because through this list of names there's an incredible story that's being told. There are some incredible things that we find as we study out the people that are being talked about in this list. Now some people will compare this to a list in Luke and notice there's some differences. For instance, Luke starts out with Jesus, then he works his way all the way back to Abraham and then to Adam actually, where Matthew, he starts with Abraham and moves forward. Many scholars would believe that Luke follows the lineage of Mary, while Matthew shows the lineage of the throne, while others would say it shows the lineage of Jesus' adopted father, Joseph.

The thing that also maybe would be helpful for us to know is that this was a Jewish culture and in the Jewish culture, it was an oral culture. So they would have passed down this information by sharing stories because it was rich and it was filled with tradition. Much like maybe this last Thursday on Thanksgiving, our family sat around the table and they were sharing stories about my kid's great-great grandparents and these epic things that have taken place. But these stories in the Jewish tradition would have been shared often. They would have been shared down through the lines because this story was a story through years of hope and rescue—the story of restoration. They would have noticed these names that had been told much in the same way if we were to recount the history of America. Names like George Washington or Abraham Lincoln start to be mentioned; we'd connect with that instantly. The same was with them as well.

As we look through this, we also realize that obviously there are some names that are omitted from this list. It may be helpful to note that the Greek verb translated *was the father of* does not require immediate relationship, but it would often mean something more like, *was an ancestor of*. And so, as was the custom in Jewish culture, they would align these up into an order that would help it to be retold, and you see elements of that all throughout this passage, on into verse 17 as well. But most genealogies of the day would stack up a list of names that would help them look good, much like a résumé that we would do today. They would want this to look really, really good, so they would want to put people in there that had prominence. They'd want to clean it up as much as possible, so that often allowed them to omit people who were maybe a bit of a mess—maybe like Harry the Great did when he took out all sorts of names from his genealogy from people that he didn't want to be connected with.

Well, the thing that may be more interesting than this story is not the names that are left out, but the names that are intentionally left in. You'll see what I mean here in just a bit. One of the things that the early readers would have noticed right away is that there are women's names recorded in this genealogy. Culturally, at that time, only men's names were recorded in genealogies and not only that, but some of the women that are listed in here carried with them a bit of a mess. You will see as we start in verse 2 here:

> **Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.**

Now you'll remember Jacob. Jacob, back in Genesis, had several sons. One of his sons, Joseph, the son he truly, dearly loved and that he gave Joseph special treatment—he gave him this special coat. And his brothers hated Joseph and they were incredibly jealous of Joseph and his coat, and so one day his brothers all see him coming and they decide they are going to kill Joseph. So they grab him; they take off his coat; they throw him into this pit and later wanting to kill him. One brother is thinking that he will come back and save him, but as they are all sitting there, one of his other

brothers, Judah, sees a caravan passing by on their way to Egypt, and he thinks, "Wait a minute; lets not kill him." (I just imagine Joseph sitting there and going, "Uh, all right!") And then he says, "Lets sell him." (...and instantly drops again). And so that's what they do. Judah, thinking what he could gain from this, not caring about his brother but thinking of personal gain, and so they sell Joseph into slavery.

You move on to Genesis chapter 38, and you find more of the story of Judah. Judah actually has a couple of sons. One of his sons, the oldest, is named Er. So Judah goes to the Canaanites to find a wife for his son. He finds a woman named Tamar. She seems like she would be a great fit and he brings her back. But Judah's son Er is a man of incredible wickedness, so much so it tells us that Er dies because of his wickedness. So Judah, in keeping in line with the Levirate marriage has Onan, his brother, take care of Tamar and marry her. But Onan doesn't fall far from the tree and Onan doesn't want to provide a family for her, and the Bible tells us that he is killed also because of his wickedness. So Judah sees what's happened and he starts to just shrink back on his commitment to Tamar. He starts to just break his covenant; he starts to put her out on her own. Now a woman in this setting is not going to have many options to be able to survive without a family. And so Tamar decides that she will dress herself up like a prostitute, put a veil on her face and wait by the road that Judah will pass by.

Sure enough, he comes along. They meet. Judah sleeps with her and Tamar ends up getting pregnant, but Judah doesn't have anything to pay her with, so he gives her his staff and his seal as a commitment that he will come back and pay her. Well, months later it's found out that Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar, is pregnant. And Judah gets self righteous and angry and it actually tells us in Genesis 38:24: "**Bring her out and let her be burned**". Now stoning would have been a customary thing at this time, but he wants to take it a notch farther, so they bring Tamar out and as they are bringing her out, she says, "Okay, but before you kill me, just know that the man that I am impregnated by is the owner of this staff and this seal." Dungk, dungk, dungk...*(laughter)* Judah realizes it's him! He stops the execution; he repents, and he realizes that he's the one that has created this mess.

Now I grew up going to church. I was in Sunday School all the time and I never had this story on flannel graph. (*laughter*) And yet in this passage, we see this is listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Maybe it will help to go back a little farther and understand this story that's unfolding through this. It goes clear back to Abraham in Genesis chapter 22. If you want to turn there, you can follow along with me. Now Abraham was singled out by God for a promise. He's been told by God to leave his country, his people, his father's household and go to a place that God would show him. And in Genesis 12 he tells all this and that God plans to bless him and that all the earth, all the nations, will be blessed through him. Now Abraham gets old—he's not going to live forever—so this blessing has to be carried out through his family. But Abraham and Sarah have no children and Abraham tries to create his own plans to make this happen. But then, finally, in his old age God blesses Abraham with a son—Isaac. Not long after God blesses him with a son, listen to what He asks him to do. Genesis chapter 22, verse 2:

> **God said, "Abraham, take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning and he saddled his donkey and he took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son. He split wood for the burnt offering and rose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day, Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance and Abraham said to the young men, "Stay here with the donkey and I and the lad will go**

> **over there and we will worship and we will return to you." Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, he laid it on Isaac, his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. And Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father, and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. Then they came to a place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son, but the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham." And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad. Do nothing to him for now that I know that you fear God since you did not withhold your son, your only son from me." Then Abraham raised his eyes and he looked and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and he offered him up as a burnt offering in the place of his son.** (Gen. 22:2-13)

Now as we read through this passage, there are several words that start to cluster together, start to line up, start to point to something. It's incredible as read through this, we find words like **only son**, and **sacrifice**. We find the word **Moriah** which interestingly enough is where God chose to meet David, and later Solomon—God has them build the temple there. You see words like the **donkey** and **third day**, and **place wood on his son**. The son is called **a lamb**. He's a willing sacrifice—a substitutionary sacrifice. You see this isn't just a story about Abraham and Isaac. This is a story that's going to unfold through generations of incredible hope and restoration. This is a story that is amazing, that's flowing through this lineage. It flows through Abraham, through Isaac, down through Jacob, through Judah, and now to Tamar.

And Tamar—she's pregnant with twins and, as she's pregnant with these twins, one of them during childbirth reaches out actually first and the midwife that's there actually ties a red cord onto the wrist of that child, because the firstborn comes with a promise, comes with this inheritance. It's something that they want to remember because something is unfolding in this that's incredible. And it's through this that Perez and Zerah are actually born. This red cord kind of runs as our reminder through the story and leads to something beautiful. This actually brings us to another person in this. In verse 3 it says:

> **Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab...** (Matt. 1:3-5a)

Rahab—she was another woman. She was another Gentile; she was another outsider; she is not an Israelite, and also she was a prostitute. Rahab just didn't dress up like a prostitute in the way that Tamar did. Rahab *was* a prostitute. She lived in Jericho and in the ancient times, if you didn't have a family to surround you, you could do one of three things: you could starve to death, you could go out and beg, or you could become a prostitute. I'm sure that no girl at that time and in that place, said, "Boy, that's what I want to be when I grow up." And yet this is where Rahab finds herself. In Joshua chapter 2, it tells us that these spies came into Jericho and they were checking out the city, and they meet Rahab. She shows them great kindness and because of her great kindness, they tell her to tie a scarlet cord to the window where she lets them out and, when they see the scarlet cord, it

will be a sign—a sign that her and her family that she gathers together, will be saved. The scarlet cord will be a sign of salvation.

So through this genealogy it continues to wind down through names and people, and we get to Ruth, who was a Moabite. Moabites were the enemies of the Israelite people, and yet Ruth, this incredible woman, becomes the grandmother of David, which brings us to David. Ahh, David!

Jesse was the father of King David. Yes, King David, the king that all other kings would be compared to. David, the man after God's own heart. David, this guy that's slain a giant. This guy that was watching over his flock of sheep and these wild animals come in and he kills them. David! Now here finally we have somebody of prominence—somebody that we can put our stake on. And yet, in this he describes him a little bit different 'cause David was anointed by Samuel to be king, following Saul. Saul didn't really like that, so at one point he's trying to kill David and David, with some of his friends, gathers them together and they become fugitives. They become known as David's mighty men. They risk their lives together for him and one of these men is Uriah. And yet, what we find here for Uriah is—it says here:

> **Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah.** (Vs. 6)

That's right! David saw Bathsheba; he lusted after her; he desired her, had her brought to him. Bathsheba became pregnant, had Solomon and David has Uriah killed to try and cover it up. That David! And that David is included in this genealogy. You see the reality of this is that all of us come with a mess. Some are just a little better at covering it up than others. Sometimes it takes diving into the mess to show you the mess that you've got.

I remember getting a phone call from a man. We were living farther away. He said, "Josh, there's a woman and her daughter; they've been in a rough spot; they're down at the homeless shelter but they just don't feel that would be a good spot for them right now. I don't know anyone else to call and you are the only person I know. Will you help us?" I remember thinking, Okay, I'll make some calls; I'll try to do some different things. So I started getting on the phone and trying to help, trying to get some calls together—yet I can't really connect with anyone. So it becomes evident; Josh, you're going to have to be the one to dive into this mess. So I think, Okay, fine, we'll get a hotel. That will help for the night. So I call the hotel and say, "Here's the deal. I want to set up a room for this mom and her daughter," and they say, "Great," and get everything set. But they said, "You're going to have to come here to pay for it," and I'm thinking oh, it's in the middle of the week and it's night, and I should be off, and I'm in town and on my own here. And so I get in the car, grumbling and complaining, driving all the way into this hotel. And as I'm driving, I feel God compelling me, "Josh, what could you give her?" I'm thinking, "Did you forget about the hotel I'm going to?" And He just starts challenging me, "What do you have in your wallet. How could you continue to dive into this, to be a part of this?" And as I pull up and sit down and we start to talk, she begins to share her story. As she shares her story, it becomes very evident of this mess that she has had to struggle and work through. She finishes and I just share with her, "Hey, sorry about this spot that you find yourself in. I'd love to help you out. Here's something; it's not much, and I wonder if I can pray with you?" Tears start streaming down her face. She brings her thirteen-year-old daughter in and introduces me and we sit there and we begin to pray together. And the whole way home God is challenging me to repent at this opportunity I almost missed out on, because of my pride and my selfishness, and my desire to keep messes at an arm's length away. Sure, I'll help for a bit, but when it starts to impact my time and my schedule, I want out.

And yet this story is filled with people who have messes, because we all have messes. They are real people, and as you continue to journey through this, you realize that there are all sorts of incredible people throughout this. There are godly kings like Jehoshaphat and Josiah the reformer that do amazing things. There are other good kings like Uzziah that was a good king but he arrogantly tries to sacrifice in the temple of God and God judges him with leprosy. And you find even other kings in here that were wicked kings like Ahaz and Manasseh that both led their people into idolatry. At different times they actually sacrificed one of their children—and in the fire of a false god. It seems that the story is a record of the genealogy of human error and sin and failure. And yet this is the story that Jesus uses to introduce His line as the Savior of the world. I think it shows us that everyone, even the greatest, still needs the grace of Jesus Christ and that no one, not even the worst, can fail to receive Jesus Christ's grace.

And so we come to the end. We've been waiting. We get to the end of the Old Testament where, in Malachi 4 there's a blank page that we flip and we realize: this is a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. We read through this list of stories and names that unfold and we get to verse 16 and it says:

> **Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.** (Matt. 1:16)
>
> ...the anointed One! Actually skip ahead and to verse 23 in chapter 1 and it says: **Behold the Virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means "God with us."**
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> John 1:14 says that: "**The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."** ...dwelt among us! **We saw His glory, glory as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth..**

I don't know the mess that you have walked in here with this morning. I don't know if the mess is something that comes from consequences of your own actions or if it's a mess that has come into your life which you have absolutely no control over. But I want you to know that God meets you there, right in the middle of the mess. What if, in the midst of this mess, you didn't give up hope? Paul tells us that God has placed us right here so that we would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him because He is not far from anyone of us. In Luke 2 it tells us this:

> **The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid for behold I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all people. For today, in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior which is Christ the Lord."** (Luke 2:10-11)

What if you realized that God is right in the middle of the mess with you? What if you looked to see what God could be doing through this mess? Or what if you decided that sometimes you have to get your hands a little messy to be a part of something beautiful?

My family has a good friend; his name is Mike and Mike will take this lump of clay—it's messy; it's gooey; it's wet; it's slimy, and he'll bring it up and he'll work it. And then he will place it on the middle of this wheel and he will sit down and, as the wheel begins to spin, he will begin to shape and form this clay. This clay is beautiful by the end of the time that Mike's done with it. In fact, Mike's stuff has been in museums and art shows. It's incredible and he asked our family one time to come join him in this, so we all went down and we were all shaping stuff and my vase gets on the top and it's kind of wobbling all around, and he'd come and form it and shape it back. And it just blows me away that you can take something so messy and turn it into something so beautiful. But in the hands of the right artist, it can happen.

No longer does my mess define me. No longer have I been stuck in my mess. No, I've been given a new identity. I've been invited into a family where I fit pretty well—a family with this Savior of the world. Not only that, but He now invites me to dive into the messes of others' lives all around me. What if your life had room for unscheduled opportunities for people around you?

I've got another friend who is in this church, and he was shopping one day and in the aisle there was an employee that was very, very helpful. He kept following them around everywhere, asking if they needed things. They were kind of dodging in and out of aisles, trying to get the stuff they needed. They gathered it all up, paid for it, and went home and realized there was still something yet that they needed. So, back to the store he goes, and sure enough, there again is the employee, following around, asking if they need anything. At one point, this friend starts to realize maybe there's something a little more in this. So he begins to talk and, as they talk and the conversation continues to develop, this employee starts to well up with emotion. He's been dealing with some difficult things, so right there in the middle of the aisle my friend starts to well up with tears as well, and they begin to pray with each other! On a shopping trip a relationship is formed and they continue to be friends. Every time he goes in, he seeks him out to find him and say, "Hi".

It's amazing what God can do when we look for opportunities to dive into the mess of others. I know of families in this church that intentionally live in certain parts of our city to bring about not only restoration on that street, but restoration on the people's lives that live there. I know of families that have made sacrifices to bring kids into their home that needed a place to stay. I know of families that are making sacrifices in order to provide for others around them, rather than their own comfort. This spans all over—from older to high school students. What if sacrifice in helping someone else could bring such incredible joy far beyond your comfort? What if we weren't as interested in being safe, protected, or our appearances as much as we were being challenged and stretched and a part of restoration? What if you intentionally looked at this season as an opportunity to pour into others' lives all around you?

I love it, what Martin Luther said about this passage, after reading through it. He said, "It's as though God intended for people to hear this genealogy and say to themselves, 'Oh, Christ, He's the kind of person who's not ashamed of sinners. See, He even puts them in His family tree."

> *Father, I pray that we would be a church that not only realizes the messiness of our own lives and that we are being loved and rescued and redeemed, but, Father, may we be a church that joins Jesus in diving into the mess of other people's lives all around us. Father, would You give us eyes to see that; would You give us courage to step up and take action? And, Father, even now, would You be putting people on our heart that we could dive into the mess with? Father, thank you for who You are and that You chose to do that for us. We love You. We pray this in Your name. Amen.*

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